

EXTREMES IN OPINIONS:
A CAUTION TO OUR EDUCATED YOUNG MEN.

AN ADDRESS

DELIVERED AT THE ANNIVERSARY

OF THE

PHRENAKOSMIAN SOCIETY

OF

PENNSYLVANIA COLLEGE,

Gettysburg, September 19, 1855,

BY

DANIEL WEISEL,

OF HAGERSTOWN, MD.

GETTYSBURG:
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CORRESPONDENCE.

PHRENAKOSMIAN HALL, Sept. 19, 1855.

HON. D. WEISEL,

Dear Sir :—We are instructed by the Phrenakosmian Society, to give you assurance of the great gratification with which your most excellent Address was heard by them, and to solicit a copy for publication.

With the hope that it may be in accordance with your feelings to comply with this request,

We remain

Yours Respectfully,

G. A. LONG,

C. E. S. MCKEE,

J. RINEHART,

J. W. SHUEY,

J. I. BURRELL.

CORRESPONDENCE

GETTYSBURG, Sept. 20, 1855.

GENTLEMEN:—It affords me great pleasure to learn from your kind note of yesterday's date, handed to me this morning, that the Address I have had the honor to deliver before the Phrenakosmian Society of Pennsylvania College, at their recent Anniversary, was heard by them with acceptance and approbation. Agreeably to the request of the Society, I will furnish you a copy of it for publication.

With assurances of my regard,

I remain

Very truly yours, &c.

D. WEISEL.

To MESSRS. G. A. LONG,
C. E. S. McKEE,
J. RINEHART,
J. W. SHUEY,
J. I. BURRELL.

A D D R E S S.

GENTLEMEN OF THE PHRENAKOSMIAN SOCIETY—

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

THE true power of mind consists in accurate and useful knowledge, properly applied. The design of education is to prepare the mind for these great purposes; for its main objects are, the acquisition of knowledge, (which always implies truth), and the right ordering of the mind for this acquisition, and for dispensing its fruits afterwards.

Much good is therefore expected from the educated mind; and rightly so, particularly in this day of progress and advancement. With the growth of our country in population, power and influence, the state of learning within our borders keeps reasonable pace. Common school education is more and more favorably regarded and adopted; and the facilities of liberal instruction are multiplying on every hand. Old prejudices against classical education are fast wearing away. Formerly, it was not only in a great degree difficult to be attained, but it was regarded as

the privilege or the accomplishment of the rich and luxurious. By many, too, it was derided, as something fit only for spoiling a child, or preparing him to spend a patrimony, or beggar a family once comfortable or prosperous. Now, it has become an every day want in almost every family. The poor widowed mother will labor at her needle to afford her son a finished education, as his best legacy and endowment for life. Almost every hamlet in our beloved land, and many a cottage, have furnished their quotas to the catalogues of our academies and colleges, and many a bright gem has been produced from some rude material, which otherwise would have lain neglected, and has been placed conspicuously in our national diadem of talent and virtue. True, many have failed in the intellectual encounter, and have done no honor to themselves or the cause of education. But the instances of this kind, in which, as is commonly said, education has been thrown away, are those of young men led away by vice and intemperance, ever the foes of intellectual improvement; ever the destroyers of character and hopes. Application to the calls of education—attention to her beseeching voice—would have reclaimed the dissolute, and elevated him to respectability and usefulness—the road to honor—in this or any other country.

The importance of liberal education is not only no longer questioned, but it is everywhere acknow-

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ledged. It has become a great cardinal interest of the State. At one time it was scarcely honored with a sentiment on our public or festive occasions. Agriculture, commerce, manufactures, seemed to be the only interests worth sustaining ; although it is hard to conceive how these, or any one of them, could be advanced without a corresponding mental impulse. For mind presides over all business, and in the same proportion that the mind is instructed in any department of the business of life, and is brought to bear properly and judiciously upon it, will that employment be promoted and excel. True, without physical labor, little or nothing can be done ; but to direct that labor readily, cheaply, and successfully to its object, the mind of the laborer himself, or of some one else, is required. The one is as essential to the other as the soul to the body. The power of the steam-engine is great, many times irresistible. But it requires knowledge, vigilance and skill, not only in its construction, but in its management and control, when applied to its important purposes. Commerce cannot flourish without the combined powers of agriculture, manufactures and navigation. And agriculture without either, would be but a tame, laborious and plodding occupation. But bring the instructed mind to bear upon it, and the field will but brighten the more under the beams of intelligence shed upon it. The dews of genius, knowledge, and patient research and experiment, will unite with the

dews of heaven and the early and the latter rains, in mellowing the soil, and imparting fresh vigor to every plant, and tree, and flower. Beauty will follow where utility leads, scattering her charms and communicating interest to every object in nature—enlarging the sources of a pure and a refined happiness.

Education, in all its grades, being thus acknowledged, and the facilities of diffusing it being thus multiplied and on the increase, a duty is devolved, both upon the professor or teacher, and the student, to see that its great objects are not departed from. It was never designed to make its subject less respectable, less interesting, less useful, less obedient to the laws, less patriotic, less reasonable, less a christian. In the task of developing and improving all these elements of character, care should be taken to guard the mind against over-excitement, and excess of thought and opinions.

It is to this subject, **THE TENDENCY TO EXTREME OPINIONS**, that I would solicit the attention of the youthful votaries of learning and science, here assembled, on this occasion, desiring to embody what I have to say upon the topic, in the form of a caution.

An invitation to think and reflect, to guard and restrain, may have nothing winning in it. The attention asked, will find in the performance, nothing to amuse or to captivate. If suggestions for a proper culture of the understanding, so as to avoid its perils, and for a healthful mediocrity in its various pur-

suits and employments, can hold out no inducements to the ear of my audience, I must, of course, fail in enlisting its attention.

Youth, or early manhood, is always the season of excess. And that there can be excess as well in the indulgence of thought as in that of the appetites and passions, is too obvious a proposition to admit of argument or illustration. Neither is it meant by this expression, that the habits of study can be carried to extremes, so as to impair the health, both of mind and body, hurrying the one to madness, or the other to a premature grave. The reference is only to that species of mental activity which, scorning the reins of right reason, calmness and consideration, indulges in the speculative, the novel and the wild ; and habituating itself to this kind of indulgence, is ever ready to grasp at conclusions which have no warrant in the thoughtful and reflecting mind ; to that sprightliness, impetuosity and fire,

“which impel rash youth,
Proud of his speed to overshoot the truth,”

Again, this season of youth, with all its natural temptations to overstep the bounds of reason and good sense, is more exposed in our own country, and at this day, to excesses, than formerly, or in any other country. This is owing to a relaxation of parental discipline in boyhood, and chiefly to a too early mingling with the political and party strifes which characterize our people ; so that very often youth,

before he has attained his majority or suffrage, professes full knowledge of all the questions which agitate the body politic, has formed his preferences for men, and is ready to engage full-handed, as candidate or otherwise, in the general turmoil, as soon as the legal restraint shall have been removed. That this practice may be beneficial in some respects, is not disputed. The young man grows into the citizen, and it is better to take with him into that new relation, a knowledge of its duties, and of the questions of public policy, than a mind unfurnished and unsuspicious, and therefore an easier prey to the designs and arts of the demagogue, who feeds upon the ignorance and the prejudices of those whom he labors to engage in his support. But it is here adverted to as one of the causes, if not the main cause of that early tendency to extremes of thought and action, which is everywhere observed in our land. *Young America* has become a boast, as signifying the displacement of age and experience by the young and ardent, who enter upon the political arena with the cry that there is no virtue in grey hairs or a matured judgment, but that, as our country is powerful and great, notwithstanding her yonth, so all power and political virtue and sagacity reside in the arms and the heads of the young men of the country. They are the hope, the future stay of the country and its institutions, all will admit; but all are not prepared to concede to them the position, or the preparation

for it, which the sentiment imputed would imply. Youth is the season of cultivation. Summer days and fruitful autumns will come in their turn, when the general vegetation will be expected to grow and mature. Exceptions there are, in the kingdom of nature. Some plants are of rapid growth, and soon yield their fruit or their flower. So the annals of genius afford many instances of remarkable wisdom and ability in early manhood. William Pitt, the younger, Napoleon Bonaparte, and Alexander Hamilton, occur as examples, all cotemporary, and flourishing only in the past generation. Besides genius, however, they had that self-control, and that discipline over their mental powers and operations, which adapted their faculties to the conduct of the great affairs in which they were involved.

Then again, the theatre of action is one highly favorable to a diversity of opinions, and to extremes of thought and action, in morals, in religion, and in politics. Ours is the freest government on earth. The press is not only free, but abounding and prolific beyond example. Religion is free and unshackled, furnishing votaries of every grade and shade of opinion and faith. The honors and the emoluments of the State are open to all aspirants who may choose to tread the devious paths that conduct to them. Our political system comprises, not simply one regularly organized government, but thirty-one States of the Union, each possessing its executive, legisla-

tive, and judicial departments, and holding out temptations in honors and rewards, calculated to enlist the best talent, or the most ardent ambition of its citizens. This number of States, composing the Union, is not complete. Our territory, old and newly acquired, is vast; not mountain, but ocean-bound; and rapidly does the work of incorporating new States into the Union advance, with all its diversified views and interests, necessarily attendant upon such an operation. Uniting all, and to some extent over all, is the general government, the model republic, exhibiting to the world one of the most powerful of the national families on the globe, with its array of offices and salaries adequate to the enlistment of the best talent, and the proudest aspirations within its extended borders. To these are to be added the different professions, with all their fascinations and hopes, inviting genius, talent or capacity from every quarter, with their hosts of eager and rapidly prepared votaries, all stimulating the employment of mind, and addressing the various desires of the heart. To say nothing of the other intellectual departments of life—the walks of literature and science, the toils of authorship, the keen and busy trade of publication and book-vending—it cannot but be obvious that the theatre for the displays of intellect, is one of vast extent, presenting to the mind, ever active as the ocean's wave, every conceivable motive and temptation. There are also times, and tides, and

occasions, which properly seized or taken, may lead to fortune ; and thousands there are ready to make the most of them, eager or violent competitors for the prize which invites the encounter, and will grace the triumph. What a diversity of opinions on all subjects must thereby be generated, leading to extremes of thought and action, at war with correct and safe counsels, with a wholesome state of morals and religion, and with a healthful public opinion, so essential to the maintenance of our admirable system of self-government.

In the range of the exact sciences, where fixed rules or axioms govern, this disposition to excess has no place, or if it exist, its flight is soon arrested by some stubborn fact or principle, which confines it to its legitimate sphere. There was a period before the laws of gravitation, and the principles which regulate our planetary system, were discovered and understood, when that which is now so plain to the ordinary student, was the subject of the wildest conjecture, or the parent of the most fantastic theory. But the genius of Copernicus, of Gallileo and Newton, directed into the channels of pure reason, cautious inquiry and observation, and faithful and convincing experiment, scattered all these to the winds, as bases of correct knowledge, leaving them only as fit illustrations of the follies and puerilities of the human mind when exploring, without star, or chart, or rudder, the sea of discovery. Incalculable ad-

vantages have been gained for the human race by the truly scientific mind, in thus reducing and restraining its operations within the bounds of legitimate inquiry. The heavens declare the glory of God in higher perfection, when viewed through a mighty telescope, and by an eye bright with the knowledge of all the principles that govern our system and determine the relations of the different members composing it, enabling it to trace, by fair deduction, the properties of each, or calculate with reasonable certainty, their magnitude and distances. And the same excellence may be asserted of every branch of science, which has been thus defined, and which has thereby been brought to bear upon the useful and progressive purposes of life—the true object of all rational inquiry and intellectual attainment.

But the mind is not thus restrained when exploring the regions of morals, religion, or politics. And yet these are branches as intimately affecting us—yea, more important, in many respects, to our well-being, than the discoveries in physical science or the precise rules of mathematics. They are more a part of ourselves. Government and law are over and around us continually, like the atmosphere we breathe. As without the one, or with one tainted with miasma or poison, life would become extinct, or the health destroyed, so in the midst of anarchy, or with a bad system of laws or government, life, liberty, character and estate, would be the sport of

every breeze, and no one could tell to-day what would be his own fate, or the fate of all he possessed, on the morrow. How deplorably was this illustrated by the scenes of the French Revolution, and all its details of treachery, suspicion, butcheries and crimes. And whatever be the form of government under which a man is placed, he is also the subject of moral or religious sentiment or duty, and this constitutes the law of his social and accountable being. But the nature of all these, their source, authority, extent of obligation, tendency and ultimate decision, are questions upon which the mind of man will speculate and err, notwithstanding it has reason, experience and revelation as its guides. For, admitting the authority of these, the inquiry as oft is, what is taught by them, as how their teachings are to be observed. It is in these fields, particularly, that the mind is stimulated to excess, that the motives of action are more especially concerned, and opinions formed and promulgated to favor what is too often a positive evil. Let me not be understood as now referring to mere literary speculations and refinements—those pleasures of the imagination, by which the mind and the man may be led captive, those favorite theories, partaking more of the romantic than of the real or the good. Employments or productions of this kind, may be innocent in their nature or subjects, or if injurious, only so to the mind which is engaged upon them. But my reference is to the every-day concerns of

life, and the labors of those who are busy, or may lead in the formation of popular opinions, or who propagate them with zeal, in relation to morals, religion and politics.

A disregard of the love of truth, and of that universal law of moderation, which pervades all life and nature as a governing principle, and in which truth is more apt to reside, is the cause of those exciting and dangerous opinions which take possession of the popular mind at times, and occupy it to the exclusion of all else, or until some new dogma, engendered in the same manner with its predecessor, ascends the throne and assumes its empire. That golden mean—the *aurea mediocritas* of Horace—is the bond of peace and the security of happiness. He who observes it, as well in his thoughts as in the habits of his life, or the daily routine of his business or pleasures, has found a friend of more value than rubies. In it consists the secret of what the unsanctified world calls happiness, and it is sanctified by the word of God, which ordains temperance in all things, and requires us to let our moderation be known unto all men; thus engraving a law of our nature upon the christian code, and making it one of the tests of the new life. If one desires to preserve the health of his body, he must place limits upon the enjoyment of the gifts of nature. An all-wise and bountiful Providence has provided these for the good of his creatures; but to subserve their purpose, they

must be temperately used. Gluttony has claimed its thousands of victims; and even the crystal fount, when immoderately quaffed by him who is too athirst for its waters, has only refreshed him for the tomb. Beauty, which adorns its possessor, and is given to promote man's highest earthly happiness, if too highly prized by her, or its influences upon the admiration of others be not restrained, is at once a snare to her that wields it, and to those upon whom its power is exerted. The passions of the human breast, inwoven to impel to rightful and noble objects, and to nerve us for the duties and trials of life, if not guarded and restrained, drive us to acts the most ludicrous and outrageous, and often, by their violence, produce in man, in this life, the torments which partake of the condition of the lost in the world to come. The evil passions, avarice, ambition, animosity, hatred, revenge, and such like, are only the excesses of proper feelings and desires of the heart. It is lawful to earn and receive the rewards of labor and business, be they small or great, because employment and industry are virtues, and an honest independence, the consequence of these, is a principal ingredient in the sum of human happiness. But to amass and hoard wealth, in neglect of the proper wants and comforts of the possessor, and of others to whom he owes acts of duty and charity, is the part of avarice, and this passion, in many, leads not only to the unlawful desire, but to the unlawful

taking of other men's goods. It is right to feel aggrieved at the wrongs inflicted by another; for to be insensible to these, would argue ignorance of the difference between virtue and vice, right and wrong; but in disregard of the whisperings of patience and endurance, to encourage feelings of hatred and malignancy to the wrong-doer, would provoke revenge, and prompt to the fatal stroke of the murderer or the assassin. To such extremes are the passions naturally carried, that He who spake as never man spake, when he taught the multitudes those imperishable lessons of virtue and religion, which compose the sermon on the mount, urged as the best and surest safe-guard against violence of temper, that even the natural feelings should be reversed, so that, instead of hating your enemy, you should love him; that you should bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you and persecute you. And in his own life and death he exemplified these, apparently impossible doctrines, to the full. What greater agony could suffering innocence have endured, than was inflicted upon him; what more ignominious fate meted out to moral worth and God-like virtue; to say nothing of the sacrilege of raising the infuriated hand against Deity himself, in the person of his Son; and yet what prayer is it that strikes the ear from the summit of Calvary? It could only come from the bosom of love, and yet it was offered in behalf

of the most malignant, and the vilest of enemies, "*Father, forgive them.*"

A desire for the honors and the emoluments of office is natural, and is not to be discouraged. The State needs public servants, and to reward public services and capacity, or to bring into the public service, those who are well fitted for the discharge of the public trusts, is a duty; and if a pure patriotism will not sufficiently prompt to its performance, the constitution of our nature is provided with the stimulus of ambition, or the desire of fame or renown in the world's history. The passion, directed to right ends, is laudable. Better if, like Washington's, it be disinterested. But if not thus distinguished, it will need the curb of right reason; for what greater crimes have been committed, what more aggravated miseries entailed on the human family, than those which have followed the sanguinary march of the hero or the conqueror intent upon the objects of an unhallowed ambition? Riches are desirable. What benefits may flow from the right use of them? How the cause of education, of virtue, of humanity, of science, of religion, may be promoted and established by the generous and judicious bestowment of superfluous means. The example of those merchant princes of Boston, who have lately been called to their reward, passes before the mind whilst these words are uttered, and demands the homage of every grateful heart. Long will their deeds of munificence

live in the memory, and be felt in the characters and conditions of American youth and citizens; and side by side with those of our illustrious Franklin, will adorn alike the history of our race and of our country. Though Harvard, the mother of us all, receives more directly the benefit, every college and university in the land should acknowledge the boon. The example alone is a patrimony to them, for in some propitious hour they will have their Lawrences too. But riches much oftener address themselves to the baser or the ignoble passions, and furnish food for their gratification. The wants of man being enlarged by the means of supply, and every temptation strengthened by the conscious ability of meeting its demand, the outgoings of wealth conduce more to what is positively bad to the individual and to society; and even when directed in the channel of public improvement, the motive may as likely be that of inordinate speculation—a hollow offering at the altar of public prosperity—as a real desire to promote the general good. And in many such cases, the result is individual bankruptcy, checkered with fraud, and certain embarrassment to the scheme which was ostensibly subserved. Surely a review of all these tendencies to excess, whether developed in the enjoyment of the gifts of nature, or in the course and history of human passions, but confirms the truth that the proper regimen is moderation in the use of the one and the indulgence of the other. The hap-

piest of the seven wise men of Greece, announced the maxim, “*metron ariston*”—mediocrity is best. And the wisest of men prayed: “Give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food conyenient for me: lest I be full and deny thee, and say, who is the Lord? or lest I be poor and steal, and take the name of my God in vain.”

Now all these considerations bear upon, and illustrate the proposition which I have in view in this performance. The mind, strictly so called, is as prone to excess as the passions; or rather, is influenced and carried away by them, and is constantly exposed to their action. The region of pure thought and reason, when undisturbed by the sallies of the imagination, or the storms of the passions, is the one for the formation of correct opinions. But as the constitution of man is complex, and this is acted upon by the various circumstances of his being, he is either the child of these, or is constantly liable to be influenced by them. Education, habit, interest, association, prejudice, even the best affections of our nature, are ever ready to modify or pervert the truth, or warp the judgment. If opinions were mere visionary ideas, and did not constitute the reasons or principles of action; if they were not carried out in the transactions of life, it would be a needless task to counsel caution, or persuade the mind to a sense of its rightful duties. But it is because man is a rational creature, and his actions must be brought

to the test of reason and judgment, and because the design of education is, or should be, to feed the mind with appropriate aliment, and discipline it in the ways of truth, that every individual, especially the educated, is responsible for the opinions which he entertains. If his own reputation is not concerned, the good of society, of which he is a part, is; for his precepts or his example must necessarily influence, to some extent, the conduct of others, and they may conflict with the just rights of those with whom he stands connected. And it is no excuse, to urge in palliation of the excesses to which some persons are carried, that they are misled by others, or that they are sincere in the opinions they avow. If the subject matter be one on which there can be no diversity of opinion, there is no liability to excess. But on questions which admit of different views, the contest of mind with mind arises, and this contest becomes violent in proportion as our immediate interests or hopes are involved. These, in the end, have more to do in controlling and fixing the opinions, than any arguments which may be enlisted in the service. "It is to be remembered," says an accurate and able writer, "that in questions which do not admit of demonstrative reasoning, or on which the evidence is not of the most obvious and irresistible kind, there is always room for the establishment of a contrary supposition; so that even the most improbable opinion, if viewed exclusively in the light

of those few evidences which give it an appearance of truth, may seem reasonable. And if the mind has acquired the habit of timidly, or resentfully, or perversely turning away from all evidence but that which favors its prejudices or interests, its pride or its indolence, it may hold and defend an error of opinion, without direct insincerity or conscious dishonesty. After a while, the inconclusive evidence, which at first, perhaps, by no means satisfied the understanding, has made itself so familiar, so intelligible, and assumed so fair an aspect, and has insensibly drawn to itself so many little corroborations, that all doubt and suspicion are forever dismissed, and the mind becomes absolutely enslaved by its own delusions." This is a picture of the workings of the mind, which is held up to the daily observation of every one who is at all conversant with what passes around him. It is certainly neither complimentary nor consoling. A sound mind, sound sense, upon any or all subjects, is an obvious desideratum. It is claimed by the enthusiast and the fanatic even, the very individuals in whom it is most wanting, who exemplify more than others, those extremes of opinion which are fostered by too wild an imagination, or too impulsive a heart. It is only by a proper discipline and government of the whole man, by a system of balances and counterbalances, by an encouragement in one direction, and a restraint in another, by an equal and just employment of all the powers

of the soul, that these delusions, and this ultraism, can be avoided, and the mind made to act in its appropriate sphere, that of directing and governing its possessor in the faithful performance of duty. Where there is "self-love to urge," there should be "reason to restrain." Conscience and reason, like twin sisters, should ever be found hand in hand. They are characteristic of man, constituting him a rational and accountable being. In enlightened and educated, and especially sanctified man, we look for their best and highest displays.

Extreme opinions are the result of partial inquiries, a heated imagination, pride of intellect, a misconception of principles and duty, a desire of novelty, an undue eagerness for place, honor or influence, a want of candor, sincerity and love of truth, and motives of self-interest, rivalry or opposition. The establishment of truth, and the maintenance of right, are the professed, as they ought to be the true objects of all the encounters and contentions of mind. But with many these are only *professed*; for it is not to be supposed that one who advocates a course of opinions from a really selfish or improper motive, would avow this as the principle which actuates him. He will play the hypocrite as long as he can. To conceal the real motive is his greatest art. To profess most loudly the false one will be his strenuous effort. With Sempromius in Cato, he will exclaim:

"I'll conceal

My thoughts in passion ('tis the surest way ;)
 I'll bellow out for Rome and for my country,
 And mouth at Cæsar 'till I shake the Senate.
 Your cold hypocrisy's a stale device,
 A worn-out trick : would'st thou be thought in earnest ?
 Clothe thy feign'd zeal in rage, in fire, in fury !"

This he could do, and yet be Cæsar's friend.

But the traitor, the hypocrite, the superlatively selfish, are objects of scorn and contempt. The universal judgment of mankind is against them. Genius, talent and lore will not cover their iniquities. If the voice of praise be uttered, it is denominated flattery, or stigmatized as venal. In such cases it is not the mind that is to be guarded against. It is a corrupt heart, bent on evil as its object, or adopting an evil course to attain an object lawful in itself. Genius, talent, knowledge, eloquence, all the active powers of the mind may be invoked to aid the plot, or to grace the triumph, but they are prostituted by such use to ignoble purposes. They only deepen the crime, and practice treason upon education, and all its vital interests and glorious tendencies, when thus employed to dignify the vile, or sap the foundations of virtue, religion, and the fair fabric of government.

This, however, is not the class that I am dealing with in this performance ; and yet the tendencies and results of intemperate opinions, are equally fatal with those which proceed from direct criminal design. That the mind is prone to seize upon, and

magnify an idea, as the one only important ; to enlist in its behalf the favor and support of others ; to receive from this spirit of co-operation new zeal, and to be determined in its adherence to it by the expression and maintenance by others of opposite views, is a proposition amply learned from observation and experience. Whatever be the motive ; be it pride, self-conceit, affectation of learning and discovery, a desire of novelty, or of originating something new, devotion to principle conceived to be right, or the performance of duty conceived to be incumbent, this proneness to excess is characteristic of mind, especially the American mind, by reason of the enlarged theatre of mental operations, already referred to as existing in our country, and under our free institutions. It might not be in place to particularize the various instances of this undue bent of public opinion. They exist in church and in the State. They manifest themselves in the most important relations. They disturb the public quiet ; refuse obedience to law ; discard the constitutional obligations of the land ; appeal to a higher system of law, as superior to the laws constitutionally enacted and in force ; and are evidenced in a system of crimination and re-crimination, of action and counteraction wholly at war with the safety of government and the union, which is our national strength and bulwark, and which should enlist in its defence and preservation, all our noblest powers. What a

singular phenomenon is it, for an educated American, and in a portion of the union too, where its people boast of diffusing education among all its children, and of sustaining more schools, colleges and universities, than any other section, to be heated in the furnace of fanaticism, blinded with rage, and heedlessly trampling upon the rights, the fortunes and the lives of others, and yet avowing the belief that duty calls, and right must be obeyed. And yet such exhibitions are common. They are found, too, in other and lower latitudes than those of New England, even in our own.

Truth, right and duty are the highest objects of pursuit. Man is bound to pursue, to attain, and to practice them. But what is the truth, what are rights, what are duties? are questions for calm inquiry and consideration. They are not struck out as from a heated furnace. They are not boiled or parboiled. They are not reduced from a rude mass, by the fiery process which the chemist applies to the hard and insensible metal. The delicate fibres of the mind, the beautiful operations of thought, the emotions of the heart—constituting that admirable moral and intellectual machinery of man, so fearfully and so wonderfully made, and which omniscience and omnipotence alone could construct, and forming in their proper adaptation and combination, the character of the man for good or for evil—are not to be rudely and violently dealt with. They are the properties

or qualities that assimilate us to the Creator; the divine image or impress imparted to man when he was made only a little lower than the angels. And in a being thus constituted, especially when the reforming and renewing processes of education and Christianity have been passed upon him, we look for wisdom, for patient inquiry and thought, for respect for the rights and feelings of others, for action based on correct principle, and consistent with those rights and the public weal. It is bad enough to witness phrenzy, malignancy and superstition in the savage; and man gains but little from education or religion, if, with these, he practices the same things, though, so to speak, in a more civilized way. The madman, who unrestrained would commit the same enormities, is placed within bounds or chains. But the enthusiast or the fanatic, who has allowed one thought to obtain the mastery over all his moral and intellectual powers, and to hurry him to the same extremes, cannot be thus treated. He still ranges at large, and, strange to say, gathers his troops of admirers and followers. Having insensibly passed from under the sway of whatever reason he once possessed, he acknowledges no such faculty in others, and perseveres the more in the face of opposing argument and sound sense. If the disease were confined to the individual affected, there would be no occasion for alarm. But as it is infectious or epidemic, it should engage our anxious inquiries, and prompt us to seek

for preventive remedies, if not for the cure. In doing so, it is proper to consider the causes which produce or which stimulate the disease: and this inquiry will be confined to religion and politics.

Happily in this country there is no established church; no connection between Church and State. Religion, however, is not only acknowledged as a natural sentiment, but the Christian religion is sustained by the popular mind, and by popular support. Being indeed a part of the common law of the land, the Christian religion finds support in the law itself, which provides by enactments for the protection of its worship, and the security and regulation of church property. Its Bible is an open one, and its sanctions are invoked in courts of justice, and in the qualification of all the officers of the State. Its ministers, and none other, officiate in all our public assemblies which associate religious services with their daily duties. It is a great paramount good. The various evangelical sects into which the Christian family is divided, are also beneficial, inasmuch as they are better adapted, by a wholesome state of rivalry and emulation among them, to disseminate religious knowledge. At the same time, the religious sentiment, avowing even the christian faith, not unfrequently runs out into many wild, fanatical, and superstitious opinions and practices, which are oftener fit subjects for the shafts of ridicule, than for opposing argument. Religious zeal alone, even if but one sect

prevailed, would often lead its votary to excess, much depending upon his natural disposition and temperament. The state of religion during the middle ages, when, it may be said, but one form or sect of christianity prevailed, was marked by the direst persecutions, and the wildest adventures. The Inquisition and the Crusades are historical monuments of the infatuation of the human heart, operated upon by ignorance and a false zeal for the service or the glory of God. The mind recoils at the recital of the gross wrongs and horrid cruelties practiced in the name of religion. The Reformation, and the division into sects which followed, all standing, with but few alterations, upon the same oracles of revelation, have corrected this evil. And though excesses have been committed by a portion of these, and on our own soil too, they were limited in extent and duration, and it is fair to presume that the monster of religious intolerance cannot again raise its head in our land, whatever it may accomplish in other parts of the world. Each sect, solicitous for its own success, will keep a watchful eye upon all the others, and the first attempts at encroachment upon the rights of any, or upon the institutions of the country, will awaken the tocsin of alarm, and meet with stern resistance. The principal stimulus to excess of opinions in the church, as constituted in our country, is the temptation to originate new sects, founded upon some new article or shade of

faith, some peculiarity of worship, or some new discovery in the constitution of the church, or the administration of its ordinances. What volumes upon these topics have been written; and yet the disputants are as wide apart as when the controversy commenced. The effect of the collision has been rather to strike out new ideas for new sects to settle upon, and thus not only to prolong the contest, but to widen the field of its operations, extending to the very verge of skepticism and infidelity. For whilst it is admitted, or believed, that the existence of sects, founded upon honest convictions as to the principles of faith and practice taught by the sacred scriptures, has done immense service to the cause of religion, in the investigation of its truths, and the spread of the gospel, the converse is also true, that the human mind, availing itself of the facilities to gratify its natural tendency to excess, has run off into the most fanciful theories, or the grossest errors. It is lamentable that these should be devised or incurred in the sacred name of the Christian religion. If upon any subject the mind should be careful how it acts, it should be upon the one, which while it professes to investigate the truth of God, is intimately connected with the soul's salvation. If anywhere, here should be the soundest knowledge, the purest motives, the calmest consideration, the most charitable forbearance, the broadest philanthropy. If in any department, the mind should acknowledge the just limita-

tions of its powers, and submit like a child to be taught those things which most intimately concern its peace, it should be when brought to the volume of inspiration, to learn from supreme wisdom and goodness those lessons which are to fit the soul for its highest duties here, and its safety and happiness hereafter.

In the political world, there is room for the introduction of almost every question. It is not often that politics will venture into the church, to agitate and distract it; though this is sometimes done. Party politics should be excluded from its sacred portals, though the pulpit is not an unfit place, often, for the discussion of subjects that pertain to the duties of the statesman, and the well-being of the body politic. That divine is qualified to add lustre to the church, who is a careful student of the principles of government, as well as of our corrupt nature, and who, as occasion may require, will set them forth in their true light and bearing; so that harmony, and not conflict, may be promoted between the duties of the Christian and the citizen. The statesman may learn much from the productions and sermons of such enlightened intellects and lucid expounders as Robert Hall, Chalmers, Wayland, Alexander, and others, who have diffused the authority of sanctified genius over the realms of statesmanship.

But questions of morals and religion will work their way into the political arena, and very often they

constitute the principles or turning points of parties and party action. The various schemes for the amelioration of man, for the correction of habits, or the cures of evils in society, are magnified into questions of vital importance, and indeed made the test questions of the day, as if the whole frame-work of society and government depended upon them alone; and thus we may have as many parties as there are schemes of moral improvement. And in such a state of diversity, one extreme, strange to say, often begets another. Recently a large and influential State of our Union passed a law, based upon an issue of this kind, which its advocates claim as a complete remedy for the vice of intemperance, and the law has been found impracticable, and has been pronounced by jurists and judges, unconstitutional, as conflicting with other and superior rights; yet the advocates of it, according to a statement I have read, now insist that no one shall receive their suffrages who is not in favor of maintaining this identical law in all its provisions, impracticable and unconstitutional as they may be. And forthwith all the machinery of party is put into operation to inculcate the opinion, and reduce it to practice at the polls. This is but a fair specimen and example of this overweening propensity to extremes, which infests our people, and agitates the public mind, not only upon subjects comparatively harmless, if carried out, but upon those of a more vital and important nature,

which if intemperately persevered in and insisted upon, must shake the Union to its centre, and bring down this beautiful and glorious fabric of republican government in ruin upon our devoted heads, thereby destroying, likewise, the hopes of freedom in the world.

Our system of voluntary associations, has much to do in producing this state of things in the country. A vast amount of good is done, it is admitted, by associated labor. Many schemes of benevolence could not be accomplished without it. But, as a general rule, the good is chiefly done by those societies which have in view certain works, as, for instance, the spread of the gospel, the conversion of the heathen, the promotion of education. The operations of such bodies rarely conflict with the rights of others. They consist chiefly in the raising of funds and applying them to the objects proposed. But where the purpose of the society is to propagate a particular sentiment, and by it produce a change in the opinions and practices of the community, there is always this danger to extremes and excess. The subject being one of professed change or reform, admits of different views. Rights may have grown up under the system proposed to be changed, the interference with which, may lead to bitterness of feeling, or violence of action. Opposition on one side, only tends to strengthen conviction, and to increase the efforts for success on the other. Pledges

may be resorted to, binding the members to maintain and inculcate particular views, as truths or axioms, and a corresponding conduct as a moral or even religious duty and virtue. And these pledges are often taken under excitement of feeling, and without examination. The propositions may be true in the abstract, but taken in connexion with others, they may be modified, or can only be applied under certain circumstances. Their relative bearings may be overlooked ; and thus the pledged advocate may find himself embarrassed when called upon to apply his favorite theory. But the fact of being pledged to its maintenance, and the fear of being charged with inconsistency if he deviate, combine to fasten the error upon him, if it be an error ; or the injurious application of it, if it be an abstract truth. If a truth, or a correct principle, applicable at all times, and under all circumstances, it needs not the support of individual or associated pledges. Argument and illustration will be sufficient to commend it to the adoption of all reasonable and generous minds. If it be of doubtful character or tendency, a pledge would be used to inculcate as fixed truth, that which the mind should at all times be left free to examine, and to adopt or reject, as it would be found consonant with sound reasoning or correct motives, or otherwise. If it be an error, the pledged mind becomes a slave to that which should have no dominion over it, and which correct thought and an honest purpose would

spurn as a deadly enemy to intellectual and moral character and usefulness.

To disseminate truth is not injurious. It may be entertained and urged with fervor and zeal, yea, even with enthusiasm. It is commendable to be earnest in a good cause; it is noble to be busy in imparting that which must elevate character, and promote individual or public good and happiness. But the human mind is so constituted, that whilst it will receive and weigh argument, or yield to the voice of persuasion, it will not bend to intemperate zeal or vehemence, much less to a system that would compel obedience. Hence, whenever the pledged moralist or politician would ingraft his dogma upon the political creed, and proclaim it a test question at the ballot-box—a *sine qua non* for place or public service—numbers will revolt at and oppose it, though they may be ready to allow its importance, and to further its object, if presented in a more appropriate way.

Associations, to be useful, to avoid extremes detrimental alike to the individuals concerned and to the community, should be guarded as to their object; as being not only lawful, but not prejudicial to the rights of others. They should also have regard to the manner in which they are to be conducted; as not unnecessarily shackling the minds of members, and preventing that freedom and independence of thought which are points in every manly character.

To extend this course of remark, would be to

trespass upon time and patience which I desire to avoid. What has been said authorizes a few corollaries, which are deduced for the benefit of the young gentlemen who hear me, and who are now laying the foundation for future usefulness and honor.

Let it be remembered, in the first place, that the true power of mind is not felt or exhibited in extremes, but in moderation. This is peculiar to great and generous minds. Then all the powers of the mind have free play, and perform their appropriate functions. Redundancies should be restrained, and the dormant or the slothful qualities stimulated into wholesome and efficient action. This is in perfect harmony with independence of thought, and firmness and decision of character. The right-minded man does not emulate the violence or the martyr-like spirit of the fanatic; nor does he apply to these the name of decision. Who was more considerate and moderate in all his thoughts and opinions, than our beloved Washington, and yet, who more firm and decided in his character and generalship?

2. The practice of close, correct and patient thought, will convince you how limited are your powers, and how difficult are most subjects which you may be called upon to examine. Do not accustom yourselves to the idea that truths are easily acquired, or will come at the mere bidding of yourselves or others. Education itself, is a tedious process. And after you shall have pursued a course of education,

and entered upon the world with the highest honors of your *alma mater*, the doors of learning have only been opened to you. You have possessed advantages which are to be improved, and not perverted or abused. Their improvement will require still more thought; deeper learning; a constant discrimination between right and wrong, truth and falsehood; a more careful study of the best authors; a closer contemplation of character presented in history, or upon the living stage; and a constant recurrence to first principles and the most approved sources of information and knowledge. Be not content with shallow draughts. These rather, as the poet has said, "intoxicate the brain."

3. Cultivate the love of truth, for its own sake, as the foundation and the sum of all knowledge, and consequently as an engine of vast power. Be careful to distinguish between it and its counterfeit. If there be a tendency to excess at all, let it be in your admiration of truth, in all your inquiries and in all your pursuits. A popular writer has furnished to my mind a glowing passage, descriptive of this love, which I am too strongly tempted to re-produce, as chiming in happily with the remarks in which I have indulged on the present occasion. "The love of truth," he says, "is the grandest aspiration after the grandest object. By no other spirit can men be more sublimely animated, and in no other spirit can they more humanely come together. Let their opin-

ions then, be as many and as opposite as may be, there is no danger of ill will. This love of truth is root to all the charities. The tree which grows from it may have thousands of distinct and diverging branches; but good and generous fruit will be on them all. This love of truth is a bow of peace, ready for every concession that is honest, firm against every compromise that is not. This love of truth is the noblest stimulus to inquiry; ardent to seek, yet patient to examine; willing to communicate, but more willing to receive; contemptuous of petty curiosity, but passionate for knowledge. This love of truth is the life of all philosophy; it is that which germinates in meditation, which grows in science, and which brings a new shape of being into the universe, in the birth of every discovery. The love of truth is the spirit of all eloquence. Speech without it is but babble. The mere art of rhetoric is more noisy, but less useful, than the tinman's trade. But when the love of truth fires up the passions, puts its lightning in the brain, then let men give heed, for a prophet is among them. This love of truth is the strength of all heroism. That cause alone is worthy, which is eternally right; and he alone is worthy, who, in devotion to the right, defends it. It is such a spirit that clothes the martyr with a flame which outshines the blaze that kills him. The love of truth binds the soul to all true spirits on earth, in heaven, and to God—**THE TRUTH**, perfect and eternal. Com-

pare emulations of argument, pungencies of sarcasm, dazzling of fancy vain of its glitter, pride of logic and pomp of declamation, with the simple thoughts which the love of truth suggests, and they are but as the sound of an automaton to the voice of a man."

4. Examine well the motives which govern you. The mind never acts without some motive. The affections, the desires, the passions, are ever at work in the human breast, stimulating the mind for reasons and arguments. When the judgment is to be exercised, the ruling motive should be the desire of truth; and when this prevails, the mind will acquire a strong and vigorous habit in the pursuit of truth, and those qualities of calmness, coolness and patience, which constitute soundness of judgment. It is by this means—by placing proper restraints upon the motives, by confining the imagination to proper objects, and within proper bounds, by a due exercise of all the faculties of the mind, and by bringing them to bear upon any subject, in all its relations, influences and effects, that the mind will maintain its proper balance, and be most happily, most usefully, and most efficiently excited.

5. Avoid all obstacles to freedom of thought, and let no other pledge bind you to the maintenance of any set of opinions or rules of action, but that which is sustained by the deliberate approval of your own judgment and conscience. And in disseminating these, or urging them upon the consideration or

adoption of others, let it not be forgotten, that the mind addressed has its motives to govern it, its character to maintain, and its pride to be touched or wounded. You are not the arbiter of other men's opinions ; nor does it devolve upon one man to force his opinions upon another, and produce conformity by violence. This is at variance with the acknowledged rights of every man in a free government. In religion, it has erected the wheel, the stake and the rack. In the State, it has brought many a head to the block. In a government like ours, it is exercised in many petty ways, discreditable to those who employ them, and at variance with those just principles which should distinguish and ever govern the freeman.

In the conclusion, let me remark that an important and solemn duty is devolved upon those to whom is entrusted the mental training of the young men of our country. If our literary institutions are to reap, as well as confer honors, and prove real blessings to the land, the character of their sons for learning and knowledge, and the proper application of these in the affairs of life—be they humble or elevated—are to accomplish the objects. As a nation lives in its great men, so to form truly great men, is a work of the highest dignity, and of the most ennobling tendency and results. To inculcate correct principles, to form habits of accurate thought, and inspire a sincere desire for truth, to direct the youthful mind

to the proper sources of knowledge, and to preside over those exercises by which all these can be made subservient to the cause of science, civilization, just government and a holy religion, is to sow the seeds of greatness in the newly prepared and virgin soil. It is an employment demanding rare qualifications of mind and of character. The human heart, and its motives and springs of action, must be studied. The science of mind must be explored. The duties of life, in all its relations, are to be understood and enforced. The power of a controlling example is to be used. The interests at stake are immense. Individual character and happiness—the public honor and safety—the cause of republican virtue and free institutions—the spread and glory of civilization—the support and extension of a pure Christianity. The ground-work is laid in our Seminaries of learning. Let it be so laid, that the superstructure shall not only be beautiful to the eye, but enduring as time, unaffected by the assaults of error and a false philosophy, unshaken by the storms of fanaticism.